in bankruptcy. In 1976 major portions of the line were included in the newly formed Conrail. The remaining portions of the Erie Lackawanna, generally referred to as the “Estate,” were judiciously liquidated over the next dozen years for the benefit of the bondholders and other creditors.

Grant’s excellent and detailed review of the decline and death of a major line is unique, since most rail histories cover only a railroad’s birth and growth. The author’s extensive sources include a wealth of primary and secondary material, plus numerous interviews with dozens of Erie Lackawanna officials. Grant concludes his valuable account with the thought that the Erie Lackawanna might still have been in operation in the 1990s if the Staggers Act of 1980 (which greatly deregulated railroads) had been enacted twenty years earlier.

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Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America. By Sarah Burns. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996. Pp. viii, 380. Illustrations, notes, index. $50.00.)

Inventing the Modern Artist draws many fascinating parallels between the way artists behaved in the late nineteenth century and the way other people did. The most striking example, perhaps, is the artist’s studio, best exemplified by the curio-stuffed painting rooms of Hoosier William Merritt Chase at 51 West Tenth Street in New York City. The interior of the Chase establishment was well known to art lovers through illustrated articles about it in the popular press, Chase’s own painted views of his self-created environment, and the round of receptions and entertainments he held there. The latter, argues Sarah Burns, amounted to public sales: in the absence of reliable mechanisms for marketing their work, artists created their own showrooms, decorated with the same romantic, exotic trappings that department stores used to lull shoppers into impulse buying. The manly but fashionable persona of the host showing his wares was also in line with the image of the American businessman-hero of the day, solid and sound despite his extravagant surroundings. Chase might have passed for a captain of industry who had just plundered the natural resources and artistic treasures of some remote corner of the new American empire overseas!

There are some surprises in Inventing the Modern Artist, including a fresh appraisal of Winslow Homer. Even old-fashioned art historians with little interest in other kinds of history had figured out that Homer’s hunters with their slain prey and his characteristic battles between sailors and the sea had something to do with Social Darwinism and the mechanics of relentless capitalism. But Burns draws a sharp portrait of a shrewd businessman with a taste for sub-
subject matter that touched responsive chords in American men much
like himself: small, neat fellows in suits (if photographs of the artist
are to be believed) who pined for outdoor he-man adventures and
often behaved as though a business deal were a muscular tussle with
the very forces of the universe.

Reflecting current historical scholarship, Burns takes particu-
lar care to point out how artists fit into a new world view defined by
consumerism, masculinity, and the image-making capacities of the
mass media. But one wonders, in the end, if artists thought about
department store baubles, the rules of proper drawing-room deport-
ment, or much of anything else in these terms; whether, to use her
recurring phrase, they "constructed" or invented a world anything
like the one imagined by historians. Thirty years ago historians of art
saw artists as essentially passive characters waiting on the railroad
platform of style. The train pulled in, and they scurried into cars
labeled "Post Impressionism" or "Cubism"—and the historian's task
was done. Today the cars are labeled "gender," "consumption," and
the like, but the effect is much the same. Artists are passive crea-
tures, hapless passengers on a train propelled by forces utterly beyond
their control.

Determinism is a real danger in Burns's methodology. When
she speaks of art objects, however, her observations are startlingly
original and always wise. Art, if not the artist, still seems immune
to categorizing: the quibble with her methodology is a quibble with
the fashion of the times and not with Inventing the Modern Artist. In
this book Burns has constructed a sturdy bridge between contem-
porary historical writing and the stuff of art history. She also invites
readers to observe significant continuities between the Gilded Age and
the present century. Modernism was about a rupture with the past,
about "Breaking Homes Ties," the title of a sentimental genre paint-
ing by Thomas Hovenden that caused a sensation at the 1893 World's
Fair. Burns points out that Norman Rockwell took up the same theme
in 1954, with much the same result. People were deeply moved in
both instances by images that analyzed and objectified change. The
pictures spoke to something in the human condition that was not
constructed or invented. It was simply there.

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Minnesota, Minneapolis. Her most recent works are Graceland: Going Home with

Hollywood's High Noon: Moviemaking & Society before Television.
By Thomas Cripps. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,
Clothbound, $38.50; paperbound, $13.95.)

This book is almost certainly not for the typical movie buff. It
is, one might say, a compendium or encyclopedia of the complaints